

The Origins of Christianity

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Divine confusion

Most Christians today believe that the gospels of the New Testament present an essentially accurate account of the life of Jesus Christ, the 'only-begotten Son of God', who was born of a virgin, wandered Galilee as a preacher and miracle-worker at the start of the 1st century, died on a cross to redeem the sins of mankind, and then rose from the dead three days later and ascended into heaven. However, the four gospels contain such glaring inconsistencies and contradictions that they are clearly not reliable historical reports. So if they are the 'word of God', then God must be terribly confused!

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke go to great lengths to show that Jesus is descended from the line of David, as the promised messiah must be according to Jewish beliefs. But apart from agreeing that Jesus was fathered by Joseph, the two genealogies bear no resemblance to each other at all; Matthew lists 28 generations and Luke 43. Furthermore, their relevance is unclear since the authors of the two gospels also say that Jesus was born of a virgin who was impregnated by the Holy Spirit.* The Gospels of Mark and John, by contrast, make no mention of Jesus' family descent or the virgin birth.

*The Holy Spirit was traditionally regarded as feminine. Hence the wry comment made in the apocryphal Gospel of Philip (25): 'Some said "Mary conceived by the holy spirit." They are in error. . . . When did a woman ever conceive by a woman?'

Matthew tells us that Jesus was born during the reign of King Herod, who died in 4 BCE (before common era). But Luke states that Jesus was about 30 in the 15th year of Tiberius' reign, implying that he was born in 2 BCE, i.e. *after* Herod's death. He then contradicts himself by stating that John the Baptist and Jesus were miraculously conceived six months apart in the reign of Herod, but that Jesus was born at the time of the census of Quirinius, which took place in 6 CE (common era), thereby creating the miracle of a ten-year pregnancy!

The Gospels of Mark and John do not contain any nativity story, while the nativity stories given by Matthew and Luke have nothing in common except the names of Jesus' parents and the location of his birth in Bethlehem. John however says that Jesus is from Galilee and that the Jews rejected him because he was *not* from Bethlehem. Only Matthew mentions the guiding star, the three wise men and Herod's murder of all the infant boys in Bethlehem, while only Luke mentions the Roman census, the appearance of angels to the shepherds tending their flocks (in the winter?!) and the shepherds' visit to Jesus.

Luke mentions Jesus' amazing exhibition of learning in the temple at the age of 12.

The scene where Jesus drives the traders and moneychangers out of the temple is placed at the beginning of John's narrative but at the end of Matthew's. Mark has Jesus teaching only in the area of Galilee and not in Judea, and only travelling the 70 miles to Jerusalem once, at the end of his life. Luke, however, portrays Jesus as teaching equally in Galilee and Judea, while John's Jesus preaches mainly in Jerusalem and makes only occasional visits to Galilee. There are major discrepancies regarding the names of the disciples. According to Mark, Matthew and Luke (the synoptic gospels), Peter, James and John are Jesus' closest followers. In John's gospel, however, Peter plays only a minor role and James and John are not even mentioned, but there is mention of Nathanael and Nicodemus, who make no appearance in the other three gospels.

Even the events surrounding the all-important crucifixion are not uniformly recorded by the gospels. Matthew and Mark say that Jesus was both tried and sentenced by the Jewish priests of the Sanhedrin, Luke says that Jesus was tried by the Sanhedrin but not sentenced by them, while according to John, Jesus did not appear before the Sanhedrin at all. Jesus then goes to his death by crucifixion -- yet Paul and Peter say he was 'hanged on a tree' (Galatians 3:13, Acts 5:30, 10:39). John places Jesus' death on the eve of the Passover, whereas the other gospels place it on the following day. The story of a centurion piercing Jesus' side with a spear is found only in John's Gospel. The gospels give three versions of Jesus' last words: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'* (Matthew and Mark); 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!' (Luke); and 'I thirst. . . . It is finished' (John).

*This is a mistranslation of the Hebrew. It should read: 'My God, my God, how thou dost glorify me!' [1]

In John's Gospel there is only one woman visitor to Jesus' tomb, in Matthew there are two, and in Mark three, while Luke writes of numerous women had who had followed Jesus from Galilee. According to Mark, when the three women disciples found the empty tomb they saw a young man in a white robe inside, while Luke relates that 'two men in dazzling apparel' suddenly appeared. Matthew, however, paints a far more dramatic picture:

And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, his raiment white as snow. (28:2)

In Matthew the resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples in Galilee, where they have been sent by divine decree. According to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, on the other hand, the risen Jesus appeared in and around Jerusalem, and according to Acts the disciples were expressly forbidden to leave Jerusalem. The earliest versions of Mark's Gospel end with the fear of the women at their discovery of the empty tomb (16:8). The 'long ending' in which the risen Jesus appears to his disciples, was added later but is now included in nearly all editions of the New Testament. The last chapter of John's Gospel, containing Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, is also a later addition. Luke's Gospel is the only one to include an appearance in Jerusalem in which Jesus convinces his disciples that he is not a mere phantom by inviting them to handle his flesh and bones and by eating a piece of broiled fish!

Matthew and John ignore the ascension of Jesus. Luke mentions it only in one brief verse, a sort of postscript not found in some manuscripts, and it receives an equally

occurred, though some fundamentalists continue to proclaim -- rather optimistically -- that 'the end is nigh'!

Reinventing the pagan godman

Although the unreliability of the gospels and other early Christian documents as historical sources is recognized by many theologians, most of them still maintain that an historical Jesus did live in the early 1st century, though opinions differ as to his alleged divine status. However, several recent scholarly books have concluded that the Jesus depicted in the gospels never existed at all and that, far from being a completely new and unique revelation, Christianity originated as a Jewish adaptation of the ancient pagan mystery religion that had held sway for thousands of years [1].

The pagan mysteries were practised in different forms by nearly every culture in the Mediterranean and inspired the greatest minds of antiquity. Their primary aim was to promote moral regeneration and spiritual progress. At the heart of the mysteries was the myth of a dying and resurrecting godman, who was known by different names in different cultures: in Egypt he was Osiris, in Greece Dionysus, in Asia Minor Attis, in Syria Adonis, in Italy Bacchus, in Persia Mithras. The name 'Osiris-Dionysus' was sometimes used to denote his universal and composite nature.

All the following features of the story of Jesus can be found in *earlier* stories about pagan godmen [2]: he is the saviour of mankind, the son of God, born of a virgin; he is born in a cave or cowshed on 25 December or 6 January;* his birth is prophesied by a star and witnessed by three shepherds; he is wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger; he is tempted by the devil; he is baptized; he heals the sick, exorcises demons and turns water into wine; he preaches the gospel of love, charity and forgiveness; he is surrounded by 12 disciples; he rides triumphantly into town on a donkey while crowds wave branches; his disciples symbolically eat bread and drink wine to commune with him; he dies at Eastertime as a sacrifice for the sins of the world by being hanged on a tree or crucified; his corpse is wrapped in linen and anointed with myrrh; his empty tomb is visited by three women followers; after his death he descends to hell, then on the third day he rises from the dead and ascends to heaven in glory; his followers await his return as the judge during the Last Days; through sharing in his passion, Jesus offers his disciples the chance to be born again.

*There was a dispute in early Christianity as to when Jesus was born. It is interesting to note that Horus, Mithras and Adonis/Tammuz were said to be born on 25 December, while Osiris-Aion was born of the virgin Isis (also known as Mata-Meri or Mother Mary) on 6 January. Adonis/Tammuz was born of the virgin Myrrha in the very cave in Bethlehem now considered the birthplace of Jesus.

The passion of Baal or Bel of Phoenicia/Babylon, as revealed on a 4000-year-old tablet now in the British Museum, shows many points of resemblance with the later story of Jesus: Baal is taken prisoner and tried in a hall of justice; he is tormented and mocked by a rabble; he is led away to the mount; he is taken with two other prisoners, one of whom is released; after he has been sacrificed on the mount, the rabble goes on a rampage; his clothes are taken; he disappears into a tomb; he is sought after by weeping women; he is resurrected, appearing to his followers after the stone is rolled away from the tomb [3].

had been inspired by the devil! A more rational conclusion is that the story of Jesus is simply a reworking of the far older myth of Osiris-Dionysus. No one believes the stories about pagan godmen are literally true, and relating the same events in a Jewish setting hardly turns them into historical facts.



Figure. This 3rd-century amulet shows a crucified figure whom most people would immediately recognize as Jesus. Yet the Greek words name the figure 'Orpheus Bacchus' -- one of the pseudonyms of Osiris-Dionysus. The earliest known representations of the crucified Jesus date from the 5th century. [4]

The pagan mysteries comprised outer mysteries, which were open to all, and secret inner mysteries known only to those who had undergone initiation [5]. The inner mysteries revealed that the story of Osiris-Dionysus was not historical fact but an allegory encoding spiritual teachings. Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy explain:

Osiris-Dionysus had such universal appeal because he was seen as an 'Everyman' figure who symbolically represented each initiate. Through understanding the allegorical myth of the Mystery godman, initiates could become aware that, like Osiris-Dionysus, they were also 'God made flesh'. They too were immortal Spirit trapped within a physical body. Through sharing in the death of Osiris-Dionysus initiates symbolically 'died' to their lower earthly nature. Through sharing in his resurrection they were spiritually reborn and experienced their eternal and divine essence. This was the profound mystical teaching that the myth of Osiris-Dionysus encoded for those initiated into the Inner Mysteries, the truth of which initiates directly experienced for themselves. [6]

Far from being a Christian heresy, the broad philosophical tradition known as Gnosticism was the original Christianity which developed from the pagan mysteries. The gnostics did not necessarily deny the historicity of the gospel story of Jesus' life as it was an essential part of the outer mysteries of Christianity, which were designed to attract new would-be initiates. But any literal interpretation of the Jesus story was only the first step presented to spiritual beginners, while the inner mysteries revealed that it was not a factual account of God's one and only visit to earth, but a mystical story designed to help each of us become a christ by achieving union with our higher, spiritual self.

However, a rival literalist school of Christians developed, which regarded the Jesus myth as historical fact and dismissed the idea of it having a deeper meaning. The gnostic Christians viewed such literalism as superficial and simple-minded. Pagan writers, too, launched scathing attacks on the irrational beliefs of literalist Christians, and denounced Christianity as an inferior imitation of the perennial philosophy of the mysteries. The philosopher Celsus, for example, dismissed the notion that God could literally father a child on a mortal woman as plainly absurd, and described the doctrine of everlasting punishment or reward as 'absolutely offensive'. In the late 3rd century the pagan philosopher Porphyry stated that promising any criminal that he would be absolved of his sins and enter paradise as long as he was baptized before he died undermined the very

Regarding the Roman Church's doctrine that at the last judgement there would be an apocalypse of fire in which all non-Christians would be consumed and the faithful physically resurrected, Celsus commented: 'The very fact that some Jews and even some Christians reject this teaching about rising corpses shows just how repulsive it is; it is nothing less than nauseating and impossible. I mean, what sort of body is it that could return to its original nature or become the same as it was before it rotted away?' [8]. Writing at the end of the 2nd century, the church father Tertullian admitted that the claim that a human could physically return from the grave was too incredible to be believed, but the best 'argument' he could come up with was: 'It is true because it is absurd, I believe it because it is impossible' [9]. And this from a man routinely claimed to be a great Christian theologian! Celsus described Christians as irrational, because they 'do not want to give or receive a reason for what they believe' but rather win converts by telling them 'not to ask questions but to have faith' [10]. Gregory Nazianzen, a Christian saint, put it very bluntly: 'Nothing can impose better on a people than verbiage; the less they understand the more they admire' [11].

The promise of Christ and the vital force of Christianity require a literal belief not only in the crucifixion and resurrection but also in the irrational doctrine of original sin [12]. We are expected to believe that a supposedly omnipotent, omniscient and loving God *knowingly* created Adam and Eve so flawed that they succumbed to temptation by the Devil (another of God's wondrous creations?!), and then took revenge by cursing not only them but all succeeding generations as well. Having created the world badly in the first place, he was only able to fix it by sacrificing his own son, i.e. part of himself, to an agonizing death. And thanks to this act of blood atonement everyone can now be saved and enjoy eternal bliss simply by believing in Jesus, while unbelievers, regardless of how noble their lives may have been, will suffer eternal torture in hell! Why the shedding of Jesus' blood would enable or persuade God to confer forgiveness of sin and eternal salvation is never explained. Blood sacrifices (of humans or animals) are generally regarded with aversion in modern society, yet this primitive concept still lies at the heart of the orthodox Christian faith [13].

Historically unknown

Few Christians are aware that there is not a single piece of legitimate historical evidence that the gospel Jesus ever existed. The birth, life, miracles, teachings and death of Jesus are not referred to by any historians of the time, despite the fact that the centuries surrounding the beginning of the Christian era were some of the best documented in history. Apart from Luke's Gospel, no historical sources mention the Roman census that supposedly required Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem. In fact, a Roman census could not have been carried out in Palestine in the time of King Herod, for his territory was not part of the empire. Nor are there any independent historical accounts of the guiding star (which, very unstarlike, wandered through the sky and came to rest over the building where Jesus was born!), Herod's slaughter of the innocents, or the dramatic events that allegedly accompanied the crucifixion -- i.e. three hours of global darkness, an earthquake and the rending of the veil of the temple of Jerusalem, followed, according to Matthew, by corpses emerging from their graves, including the resurrection of the saints and their subsequent appearance to many in Jerusalem!

executed by Pontius Pilate, but it is clear that he is merely quoting hearsay information from his own day. Suetonius states that Jews were expelled from Rome around 49 CE because a man called Chrestus instigated disturbances among them. But Chrestus was a popular name, and even if Suetonius really meant 'Christus', Jesus was never said to have been at Rome, and certainly not nearly 20 years after his supposed crucifixion. Moreover, the authenticity of all these passages has been questioned.

Turning to Jewish historians: Philo was an eminent Jewish author who lived at the same time that Jesus is supposed to have lived and wrote around 50 works that still survive. They tell us much about Pontius Pilate, yet make no mention of Jesus. Philo's contemporary, Justus of Tiberias, wrote a history that began with Moses and extended to his own times, but again made no mention of Jesus [2].

Josephus, on the other hand, a younger contemporary of the apostle Paul, wrote two famous history books, one of which (*Antiquities of the Jews*) contains two passages which *do* refer to Jesus: one of them speaks of him as the messiah, who was crucified under Pilate and appeared to his disciples three days later. For hundreds of years these passages were seized on by Christians as conclusive proof that the gospel Jesus was an historical figure. But more careful scrutiny has shown them to be later forgeries. Since Josephus was an orthodox Jew, he would hardly have called Jesus the messiah if the Jews had really put him to death for blasphemy. Origen explicitly stated in the 3rd century that Josephus did *not* believe that Jesus was the messiah. It was not until the beginning of the 4th century that Bishop Eusebius, the Roman Church's notorious propagandist and falsifier, suddenly produced a version of Josephus which contained these passages. Nevertheless, given the lack of any other serious, nonbiblical evidence for an historical Jesus, some Christian apologists still go to desperate lengths to claim that the passages in Josephus are at least partially authentic [3].

The Jewish Talmud comprises an older stratum called the Mishna and additional matter known as the Gemara or 'completion'. The Mishna was founded in 40 BCE and was edited and amplified till about the beginning of the 3rd century CE. It contains an unbroken record of all the rebels against the authority of the Jewish Sanhedrin from 40 BCE to about 237 CE, and provides a history of the Pharisees, who allegedly put Jesus to death. H.P. Blavatsky asks:

how is it that not one of the eminent Rabbis, authors of the *Mishnah*, seems to have ever heard of Jesus, or whispers a word in the defence of his sect charged with deicide, but is, in fact absolutely silent as to the *great* event? [4]

The Talmud does contain references to a certain Jeshu, on whom the gospel Jesus may partially have been based, but one passage implies that he lived about 100 BCE. The Talmud certainly provides no support for the historical reality of a gospel Jesus living in the early 1st century.

Forging a new religion

The only other evidence for the gospel Jesus is drawn from Christian testimonies, and in particular the gospels. There were originally hundreds of different gospels, not just the

excluded from the New Testament because none of them contained any reference to the quasi-historical story of Jesus.

Even the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were all at one time or another regarded as heretical. These gospels are not eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus written by his disciples, but later, anonymous works that eventually acquired the names of their supposed authors. The first person to mention a fourfold gospel account of the life and death of Jesus, under the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, was Irenaeus around 180 CE. The earliest versions of the gospels are thought to have been written between 70 and 140 CE, most likely during the last 30 years of this period [1]. However, they then underwent many alterations, as a comparison of over 3000 early manuscripts has shown. For example, the gnostic Marcion was using a Gospel of Luke around 140 CE which did not conform to our canonical text; chapters 1 and 2 are later additions. The last 12 verses of Mark's Gospel and the last chapter of John's Gospel are also later additions. The church father Origen acknowledged that manuscripts had been edited and passages added to suit the needs of the changing theological climate [2]. As already shown, all the revisions have done nothing to remove the major discrepancies in the gospels.

Although the four gospels are always placed first in the New Testament, the letters of Paul were written before any of them and are commonly dated at c. 50 CE. It is quite remarkable that although Paul is widely regarded as Jesus' contemporary, he never claimed to have met him in the flesh or to have met anyone else who had done so;* he is concerned only with the heavenly Christ, whom he encountered in visions, and with the redemptive significance of his death and resurrection, which he never places in an historical earthly setting. Paul makes no mention of Jesus' virgin birth, his ministry in Galilee or Jerusalem, his miracles and teachings, or the details of his passion. What's more, *all* the earliest, pre-gospel Christian epistles display the same silences as Paul. It is only in the 2nd century that Jesus begins to be linked with the time of Herod and Pontius Pilate and that further biographical details emerge.

*Paul refers to John, James, and Peter/Cephas, who are commonly equated with the characters of the same name mentioned in the gospels, having somehow been transformed from simple fishermen into learned scholars. However, Paul says nothing whatsoever about them having been Jesus' companions and disciples, and the gospel tales did not even exist when he wrote his letters. On one occasion Paul calls James 'the brother of the Lord', but this does not mean he must have been Jesus' blood brother as he was the head of a community in Jerusalem which called itself 'brothers of/in the Lord'. Paul disagrees with Cephas on various matters and condemns him in very strong terms. But if Cephas is the Peter of the gospels it is odd that Paul fails to mention that he had been rebuked by Jesus as 'Satan', had fallen asleep in the garden of Gethsemane and had denied his master three times [3].

The earliest gospel is commonly believed to be Mark's, the simplest and shortest, in which Paul's picture of Jesus as a mystical dying and resurrecting godman is given a historical and geographical setting. Most of the details of the passion story are taken directly from passages in the Psalms and Prophets. Mark's Gospel (or rather an earlier version of the present gospel) was then reworked and embellished by the authors of Matthew and Luke, with details of Jesus' birth and resurrection being added. This shows that they did not regard it as a valuable historical record that must be preserved intact or as the inviolable 'word of God'. The Gospel of John, the most mystical, is remarkably different in style and content from the other three. Due to its strong gnostic flavour, many 2nd-century churchmen were opposed to its inclusion in the New Testament. What worked in its favour, however, was its insistence on the reality of Jesus' physical incarnation, in opposition to the docetic ('illusionist') trend in Gnosticism, which regarded Jesus as an eternal, spiritual being, untouched by the suffering experienced by his 'illusory' physical manifestation. Significantly, all the gospel authors betray a deficient knowledge of Palestinian geography and of Jewish rituals and practices [4].

Roman Church. Finally, the Letters of the Apostles were written (177-220 CE). Modern scholars have shown that the letters ascribed to Peter, James and John are forgeries written much later to combat heretical (gnostic) ideas within the early church; they attack 'many deceivers' who 'will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh' (2 John 7). Paul's early (and mostly genuine) letters are full of gnostic phrases and teachings, whereas his later letters (the Pastorals) are anti-gnostic, and are regarded as fakes by all but the most conservative of theologians. Forgery during the first few centuries of the church's existence was so rampant that the phrase 'pious fraud' was coined to describe it.

The evidence clearly suggests that the New Testament is not a history of actual events, but a history of the evolution of Christian mythology. The upshot of all this is that there is no substantial evidence whatsoever for the historical existence of the gospel Jesus -- a man who is supposed to have been the one and only incarnation of God on earth. However, this does not rule out the possibility that the gospel Jesus was partly based on or inspired by actual historical figures, including the Talmud Jeshu [5].

In 66 CE Jews in Judea revolted against their Roman oppressors, culminating in the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Some 600,000 people -- a fifth of the population -- died from violence, famine and disease. These events fuelled the Jews' desperate desire for a saviour, and gave impetus to the replacement of Paul's mystical, timeless Christ with a more accessible, pseudo-historical saviour who had supposedly lived on earth in the recent past. Such a figure would offer an alternative to the many disastrous revolutionary 'messiahs', or 'zealots', who sprang up during the crisis.

The Therapeutae, a group of Pythagorean, Essenean Jews, are mentioned in one of Philo's books written in 10 CE. They practised a Jewish version of the pagan mysteries, believed their myths encoded secret mystical truths, and may have played a key role in creating the Jesus myth, in which the pagan godman is combined with the Jewish messiah. The community lived near Alexandria, which was a great melting-pot of pagan and Jewish cultures and became one of the main centres of Gnosticism [6]. Ultimately, however, the Jesus myth won few Jewish converts since a messiah who was crucified as a common criminal was not the saviour they were waiting for. But it was embraced by pagans and gentiles as a new mystery cult. The fact that it incorporated elements from so many other sects and cults added to its popular appeal.

Bigotry triumphant

By the middle of the 2nd century, a battle was raging between gnostic and literalist Christians. The latter attacked the gnostics as heretics who had perverted genuine Christianity, whereas the truth is that Literalism is a degenerate form of the original Jesus mysteries of the gnostics. In the face of gnostic insistence that the Jesus story was a mystical allegory, literalists asserted that Jesus Christ suffered and was crucified under Pontius Pilate -- a statement that was repeated with such fanatical insistence that it shows how weak the literalists felt at this time. The forged Second Letter of Peter, for example, defensively asserts that literalist Christians are not following 'cleverly devised myths' (1:16)!

instance, at the end of the 2nd century Emperor Commodus was initiated into the mysteries of Mithras, another godman who was miraculously born on 25 December. In 304, just 17 years before Christianity became the state religion, Mithras was declared the 'protector of the Empire'. Then Emperor Constantine tried Christianity, which proved a more ideal candidate:

Literalist Christianity . . . was a Mystery religion that had purged itself of all its troublesome intellectuals. It was already an authoritarian religion which encouraged the faithful to have blind faith in those holding positions of power. It was exactly what the Roman authorities wanted -- a religion without mystics, the Outer Mysteries without the Inner Mysteries, form without content. [1]

At the first Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, Constantine oversaw the creation of the Nicene Creed, which is still repeated in churches to this day.* Christians who refused to assent to this creed were banished from the Empire or otherwise silenced, though the church continued to engage in political in-fighting thinly disguised as theological debate. After the 'Christian' Constantine returned home from Nicaea he had his wife suffocated and his son murdered. He deliberately remained unbaptized until his deathbed so that he could continue his atrocities and still receive forgiveness of sins and a guaranteed place in heaven by being baptized at the last moment.

*The Nicene Creed includes the following: 'We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father. . . He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.'

Constantine's personal biographer was Bishop Eusebius, who glossed over his murders with obsequious flattery. Eusebius has been called 'the first thoroughly dishonest and unfair historian of ancient times' [2]. It was chiefly he who concocted the fictitious history of the Roman Church still widely accepted to this day. It is well documented that the Roman governor Pontius Pilate was a cruel and oppressive ruler, but as literalist Christianity became more and more Romanized, the blame for the Jesus' death was shifted from Pilate to the Jewish nation as a whole. Whilst the Jews were increasingly vilified, traditions were fabricated which portrayed Pilate as a just and holy man -- even a Christian! By the 4th century both Pilate and his wife were honoured as saints!

Constantine's mother, Helena, was forced into exile after being implicated in the murder of his step-mother. She went on a tour of the Holy Land, where she discovered the tomb and birth cave of Christ, along with the remains of the three crosses used to crucify Jesus and the two thieves at Golgotha. Given that thousands of other Jews had been executed in the 300 years that had elapsed since Jesus supposedly met his death, this was truly an extraordinary miracle! Constantine erected churches on these sites, which have been honoured as holy ever since.

By making Christianity the state religion, Constantine gave literalist Christianity the power it needed to begin the final ruthless suppression of paganism and Gnosticism. H.P. Blavatsky writes:

The days of Constantine were the last turning-point in history, the period of the Supreme struggle that ended in the Western world throttling the old religions in favour of the new one, built on their bodies. [3]

In explaining why literalist Christianity triumphed over Gnosticism, Freke and Gandy write:

. . . Gnosticism attracted people of a mystical nature. Literalism, on the other hand, attracted those interested in establishing a religion. Gnostics were concerned with personal enlightenment, not creating a Church. They could never have triumphed over the Literalists, because they could never have had the desire to do so.

Literalism was originally the Outer Mysteries of Christianity, designed to attract initiates to the spiritual path. With their fascinating tales of magic and miracles, and promise of immortality through the simple acts of baptism and belief, the Outer Mysteries were meant to be more popular and widely appealing than the Inner Mysteries. . . . If the original integrity of the Jesus Mysteries had survived, the popularity of the Outer Mysteries would have naturally led more and more initiates into the Inner Mysteries of Gnosis. Once Gnosticism and Literalism were two distinct traditions in conflict with each other, it was inevitable that Literalism would prove the more popular. . . .

Above all, however, Literalist Christianity's success was due to the one great quality it had from the beginning and continues to foster -- intolerance. This is not a quirk of history, it is a logical by-product of taking the Jesus story as historical fact. . . .

If Jesus is the one and only Son of God who requires the faithful to acknowledge this as historical fact, then Christianity must be in opposition to all other religions who do not teach this. Moreover, if all unbelievers are to be damned for eternity it becomes the moral duty of Literalist Christians to spread their beliefs, by force if necessary, to save as many souls as possible, even if it means destroying their bodies to do so. [5]

The triumph of literalist Christianity ushered in a Dark Age of ignorance, bigotry and dogmatism.

Blavatsky stated that true Christianity died with the gnostics, and that modern Christianity is composed of 'the husks of Judaism, the shreds of paganism, and the ill-digested remains of gnosticism and neoplatonism' [6]. Christianity in its present ossified form has little to offer. However, Freke and Gandy hold out the following hope:

If Christianity were to acknowledge its debt to the ancient Mysteries it could connect again to the universal current of human spiritual evolution and become a partner, not an adversary, of all the other religious traditions it has branded as the work of the Devil. . . .

Only by returning to its mystical roots will Christianity play a role in the creation of a new spirituality for the New Age of Aquarius. Literalist Christianity is built on the unsteady foundations of historical lies. Sooner or later it must topple over. But mystical Christianity rests securely on the bedrock of timeless mythical truth and is as relevant today as it always has been. . . .

The ancient Mysteries taught that we are all sons and daughters of God and by understanding the myth of the sacrificed godman we also can be resurrected into our true immortal, divine identity. . . . [The myth of Jesus] points towards the perpetual possibility of spiritual rebirth, here and now. It can still reveal the Mystery which Paul proclaimed, 'Christ in you.' As the Gnostic Jesus promises in *The Gospel of Thomas*,

References

Divine confusion

[1] H.P. Blavatsky *Collected Writings*, Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1950-91, 9:271-3, 275-80, 14:146-8; G. de Purucker, *The Esoteric Tradition*, Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 2nd ed., 1973, pp. 69-75; *Dialogues of G. de Purucker*, Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1948, 3:265-7.

Reinventing the pagan godman

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[4] *The Jesus Mysteries*, www.jesusmysteries.demon.co.uk.

[5] See Grace F. Knoche, *The Mystery Schools*, Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 2nd ed., 1999.

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 258.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 281.

[11] H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* (1877), Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1972, 2:183.

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[3] *The Jesus Mysteries*, pp. 184-90; *The Jesus Puzzle*, pp. 57-8; *Jesus: One hundred years before Christ*, pp. 14-5, 215-38; *The Jesus Myth*, pp. 52-5.

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[3] *The Secret Doctrine*, 1:xliv.

[4] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p. 357.

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